

The invisible face of culture: why do Spanish toy manufacturers believe the British are *most peculiar* in business?

Victoria Guillén Nieto
University of Alicante
victoria.guillen@ua.es

The fortunate people who were able to master the art of living in foreign cultures often learned that their own modes of life were not universal. With this insight they became free to choose from among cultural values those that seemed to best fit their peculiar circumstances. (Barnlund, 1998: 49).

This discussion is dedicated to the memory of my dear Professor Brian Hughes Cunningham, a universal Scotsman who mastered the art of living in a Spanish culture.

ABSTRACT

Drawing on the model that explains culture through the metaphorical image of an *iceberg*, as well as on the concepts of *cultural frame* and *strategic cultural orientation*, the aim of this paper is to explore the reasons that might explain why Spanish toy manufacturers use adjectives such as *peculiar*, *strict*, *severe*, *aloof*, *distant*, *unexpressive*, *cold*, among others, to express the way they perceive their British customers. The data consists of eighteen authentic, audio-recorded face-to-face interviews with a selected sample of Spanish toy manufacturers from the Valencian Community, together with the information they kindly provided in the questionnaires they were requested to fill in.

1. Introduction.

The mysterious nature of intercultural communication has been depicted in many literary works. A good illustration of writers' fascination with intercultural relationships is seen in most of E. M. Forster's novels. For example, in *A Passage to India* (1924), the English novelist depicts the complex Oriental reaction to British rule in India and reveals the conflict of temperament and tradition involved in the relationship through the metaphorical image provided by the inexplicable event that occurred inside the Marabar Caves. Oriental reaction to cultural imperialism and ethnocentrism are metaphorically encapsulated in the last lines of this work:

(...) “We shall get rid of you, yes, we shall drive every blasted Englishman into the sea, and then” –he rode against him furiously –“and then”, he concluded, half kissing him, “you and I shall be friends. (Forster, 1979 [1924]: 318).

In *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (1905), E. M. Forster examines the effects of the cultural clash between the British and the Italians, as well as considering how cultural expectations, attitudes, beliefs and values may be challenged in intercultural encounters, as shown in the following excerpt:

(...) She tried to laugh herself, but became frightened and had to stop. “He’s not a gentleman, nor a Christian, nor good in any way. He’s never flattered me nor honoured me. But because he’s handsome, that’s been enough. The son of an Italian dentist, with a pretty face. (Forster, 1975 [1905]: 158).

Another example of culture collision and illustration of broken cultural expectations is seen in these lines from E. M. Forster’s *A Room with a View* (1908):

(...) She only felt irritable and petulant, and anxious to do what she was not expected to do, and in this spirit she proceeded with the conversation. (Forster, 1978 [1908]: 213).

The South African novelist and short story writer N. Gordimer, who received the Nobel Prize in 1991, is another vivid example of a writer’s curiosity about intercultural communication. Most of Gordimer’s works deal with the moral and psychological tensions of her racially divided home country. As an illustration of what has been said, let us consider the way this novelist explores ethnocentrism, cultural clash, multiracialism in South Africa and Black consciousness in many of her major works: *A World of Strangers* (1976 [1958]), *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966), *The Conservationist* (1978 [1974]), *Burger’s Daughter* (1979), *July’s People* (1981), and so on.

In spite of the fact that intercultural communication has been a never ending source of inspiration for writers from all over the world and of all times, as we have already mentioned, it is relatively new as a field of academic research. Much theoretical background has come from the USA, especially since the end of the Second World War. Firstly, input came from the US army which had been operating in many different countries, and faced numerous intercultural problems. Secondly, some ideas came from entrepreneurs who began to be aware of the fact that the USA needed to know more about other cultures if it was to increase its overseas trade. And thirdly, information came from multinational companies which began to be faced with the challenge of finding ways to help people of many different cultural origins to live and work together in multicultural work teams.

Since the 1950's there has been an increasing interest in intercultural communication, which has probably been strengthened by today's globalisation process as well as by the emergence of the European Union and the spirit of convergence arising between member states.

Intercultural communication is also interdisciplinary since it has attracted the attention of many disciplines, *i.e.*, Anthropology, History, Geography, Sociology, Psychology, Communication Science, Business Studies and Linguistics, and more recently Translating and Interpreting. This innovative and multidisciplinary field of research has given rise to a great number of publications, the main purpose of which has been to identify world dimensions affecting the behaviour of mankind, as well as key orientations with which human beings face their daily living, and found that within each orientation there is a wide range of cultural perceptions, beliefs, attitudes and values.

The theoretical groundwork for this interest in intercultural communication can be found in: the investigation done by the anthropologist E. T. Hall and published in his famous books *The Silent Language* (1959) and *The Hidden Dimension* (1966); the research conducted by another two anthropologists, F. R. Kluckhohn and F. L. Strodtbeck and published in their well-known book *Variations in Value Orientations* (1961); the study carried out by the Dutch social psychologist and engineer, G. Hofstede and published in his groundbreaking book *Culture's Consequences* (1984); E. C. Stewart and M. J. Bennett's *American Patterns: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (1991); the investigation done by other Dutch scholars: Ch. Hampden-Turner and A. Trompenaars whose findings were published in their very successful book *The Seven Cultures of Capitalism* (1993) and A. Trompenaars' enlightening investigation published in *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business* (1993); R. D. Lewis, *When Cultures Collide* (1996); and last but not least, the integrated research model called "the cultural orientations model" designed by D. Walker, Th. Walker and J. Schmitz and published in their remarkable book *Doing Business Internationally* (2003).

2. The study.

This study is part of a major project called *Industrial language in the textile and toy sectors within the Valencian Community: a contrastive study in English and Spanish of their terminology and professional communicative strategies*, conducted by Professor E. Alcaraz Varó and funded by The Ministry of Science and Technology of Spain for the period 2003 and 2005.

Between 2003 and 2004, thanks to a cooperation agreement between the English Studies Department of the University of Alicante and the *Spanish Association of Toy*

Manufacturers, a survey was carried out among a selected sample of eighteen medium-sized toy manufacturing companies in the Valencian Community, located in the geographical area of Ibi. This town is situated in the north of the Alicante province, more specifically in the mountainous area 816 meters above sea level, and in the northeast of the region known as Foya de Castalla, which comprises other towns such as Castalla, Onil and Tibi. Nowadays Ibi is considered to be the national centre of the Spanish toy making industry and is known worldwide as the *Spanish Toy Centre*. This is due to the fact that over 70% of the domestic toy production takes place in Ibi, in approximately thirty seven factories. The family group, *Hermanos Payá*, founded the first local toy factory at the beginning of the 20th century. Subsequently, other factories emerged and the toy industry expanded considerably during the 1960's, the result being the creation of one of the most important industrial areas in Spain.

The purpose of the survey was twofold. Firstly, we tried to find out whether Spanish toy manufacturers were aware of the existence of any linguistic or cultural barriers that might hinder their international business relationships. Secondly, we wanted to analyse the type of communication strategies they use to overcome such barriers. Toy manufacturers were given questionnaires to complete; over eighteen hours of audio-recorded face-to-face interviews with them were recorded, and a sample of written correspondence in both Spanish and English was collected.

The results of the survey were in general terms paradoxical because on the one hand, the vast majority of the toy manufacturers sampled do not seem to be aware of the existence of any linguistic or cultural barriers that might hold back their business transactions when they claim: "Today's globalisation process has reduced cultural differences", "We're really all the same", "I just need to be myself in order to really connect", "I have to adopt the practices of the other in order to succeed", "It's really all about personality" and reduce their day-to-day difficulties and worries to pricing policies, transportation costs and charges, as well as to the emergent and, in their view, unfair competition of Chinese, Taiwanese and Korean imports. However, we found this general opinion to be in hard contradiction with the adjectives they use to express the way they perceive their British customers. *Most peculiar, inflexible, aloof, cold, strict, severe, distant* are among the adjectives used by the Spanish toy manufacturers who were interviewed. In spite of the fact that English is commonly used as the *lingua franca* in overseas transactions and this should in theory serve to oil the wheels of interaction between Spaniards and Britons, in practice the Spanish toy manufacturers sampled seem to feel uneasy and have many difficulties in understanding their British peers. It is this finding in particular that caught our attention and we would like to investigate it in further detail in this discussion.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the reasons that might explain Spanish toy manufacturers' peculiar perception of British people in business. Throughout this enquiry, special attention is given to the following research questions of direct concern to intercultural communication between Spanish and British people in business:

- a) To what extent and in what areas do Spanish and British cultural patterns collide?
- b) What are the particular friction points or areas needing special attention that commonly emerge for Spaniards in everyday interaction with Britons?
- c) What sort of strategies need to be developed to overcome cultural diversity?

To achieve our aims we will first try to understand what happens when individuals from different cultures interact by means of reviewing three key concepts: (a) *culture*, (b) *intercultural communication*, and (c) *cultural frame*. Secondly, we will compare Spanish and British cultural frames in terms of their differing cultural strategic orientations toward a number of world dimensions that have been identified as crucial for understanding human communication and interaction processes. Lastly, we will suggest some strategies for Spanish toy manufacturers to overcome cultural barriers in their communication and interaction processes with their British customers.

3. Culture

In English the word culture may be used with two different meanings: (a) *high culture* and (b) *anthropological culture*. Whereas the former refers to intellectual and artistic achievements, the latter focuses on customs, worldview, language, kinship system, social organisation, etc. which may serve to characterise a group of people as a distinctive group. (Cf. Scollon and Scollon, 1995: 124).

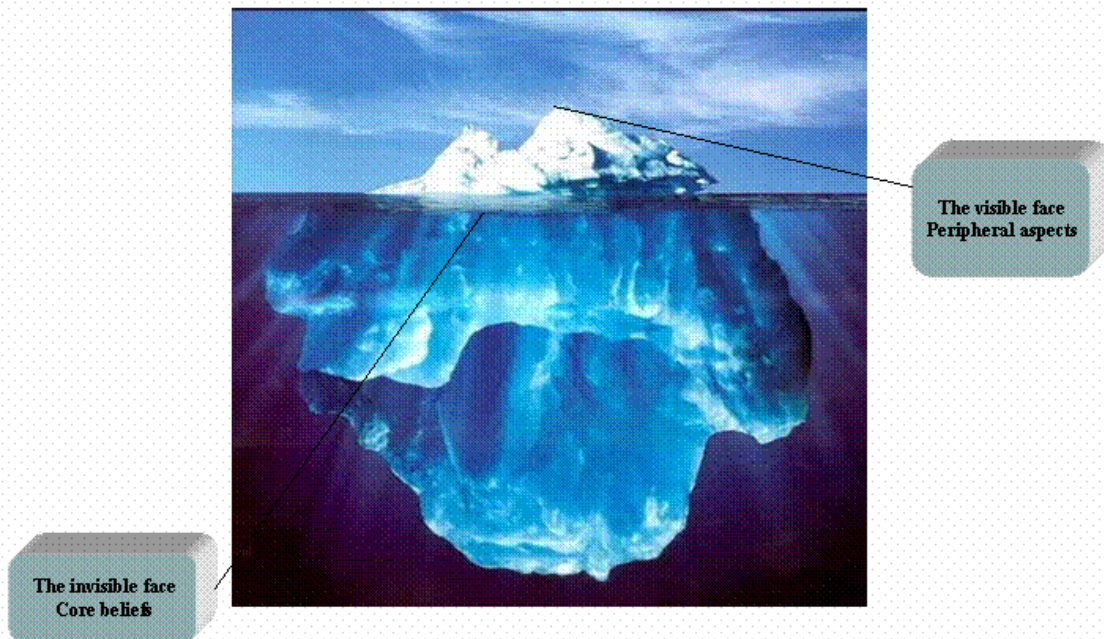
For purposes of analysis, in this discussion the term *culture* will be used with its anthropological meaning and so, it may be understood in the sense of “a shared system of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour.” (Gibson, 2000: 7) or as “a pattern of learned, group-related perceptions –including both verbal and nonverbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, and behaviours –that is accepted and expected by an identity group.” (Singer, 1998: 107). Similarly, other researchers have defined culture as “the software of the mind”, “a collective mental programming” (Hofstede, 1980) or in more colloquial terms as “the way we do things down here”. These definitions draw our attention to the way a particular group of people is trained from a very early age to internalise the behaviour and attitudes of the group.

These patterns of thinking that we have achieved since early childhood make up our *cultural frame*. This can be defined as the perceptual lens through which an individual filters the information provided by our physical senses and comes to grips with the world. Just as a lens is a piece of glass with one or more curved surfaces used as a filter to make things appear clearer, larger or smaller when viewed through it, our cultural frames perform a similar function. In other words, our physical senses provide us with information, and we can make meaningful sense of it all only by passing it through the selective filters derived from our cultural beliefs, attitudes and values embedded in our cultural frame. (Cf. Walker *et. al.*, 2003: 206). The worldwide famous anthropologist, E. T. Hall (1998: 59) refers to cultural frames in similar terms when he says that they are: “the tacit frames of reference, the rules for living which vary from culture to culture and which can be traced to acquired culture”.

A variety of metaphorical models have been used to explain the conceptual nature of culture. For instance, the *onion model* sees layers of culture which can be peeled away to reveal underlying basic assumptions. The *tree model* shows, on the one hand, visible aspects of culture such as behaviour, clothing and food hanging from the branches of the tree; and on the other, hidden aspects such as the underlying meaning, beliefs and attitudes embedded in the roots.

However, in our view it is the *iceberg model* which best illustrates the *multifaceted* nature of culture. This model depicts culture as an iceberg, with the tangible expressions of culture and behaviour above the surface of the water, and the underlying attitudes, beliefs, values and meanings below the surface.

Figure 1: The iceberg model.



As we can see from figure 1, the iceberg metaphor provides an image of the dual nature of culture, *i.e.* the *visible* and the *invisible*. The *visible face* is the outer expression of culture, that is, the peripheral aspects such as: people's patterns of behaviour, their eating habits, their clothing, their body language, social etiquette, etc. It is believed that just like the observable mass of ice floating in the sea, the visible face represents only 30% of the immensity of culture.

By contrast, the *invisible face* is the inner expression of culture, the core beliefs, that is, how people make sense of the world, their principles, their attitudes, their values, etc. This hidden face represents 70% of the dimension of culture and is comparable to the huge mass of the iceberg hidden under the water surface.

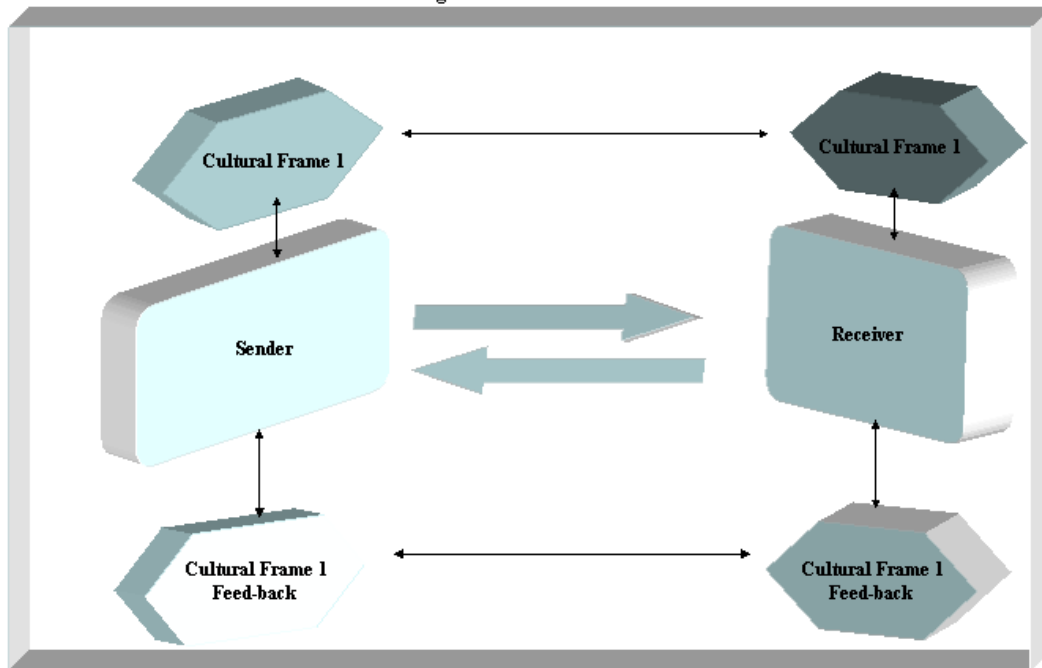
The multifaceted nature of culture is synthesised in E. T. Hall's reflection (1998: 59): "Culture hides much more than it reveals and, strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants." It is precisely this mysterious, hidden and intangible aspect of culture that may be an important source of miscommunication and misunderstanding in intercultural communication, simply because we cannot be aware of the existence of something that is hidden and hence we cannot see. Coming back to the iceberg metaphor and model, when we approach people from other cultural backgrounds, this image may evoke that of the liner *Titanic* approaching the iceberg and on the point of crashing into a huge mass of ice.

When Spanish toy manufacturers communicate and interact with British customers they may be faced with the challenge of the highly visible and explicit aspects of cultural difference such as appearance, body language, clothing, food habits, protocol and social etiquette, etc. For example, Spanish toy manufacturers may be disconcerted by the fact that people in business do not wear a tie with stripes because it acts as a flag, indicating a particular school; they may be surprised to see that people keep their hands still and do not use gestures to communicate; or they may be confused when their British peers do not shake hands when leaving. (Cf. Leaptrott, 1996: 91-92). Nevertheless, these differences are just the tip of the iceberg, a small but evident part of a much larger concealed problem, that is, the potential threat of such subtle and inexplicable aspects as their differing cultural frames, *i.e.* the different perceptual lens through which an individual filters the information provided by our physical senses and comes to grips with the world.

4. Intercultural communication.

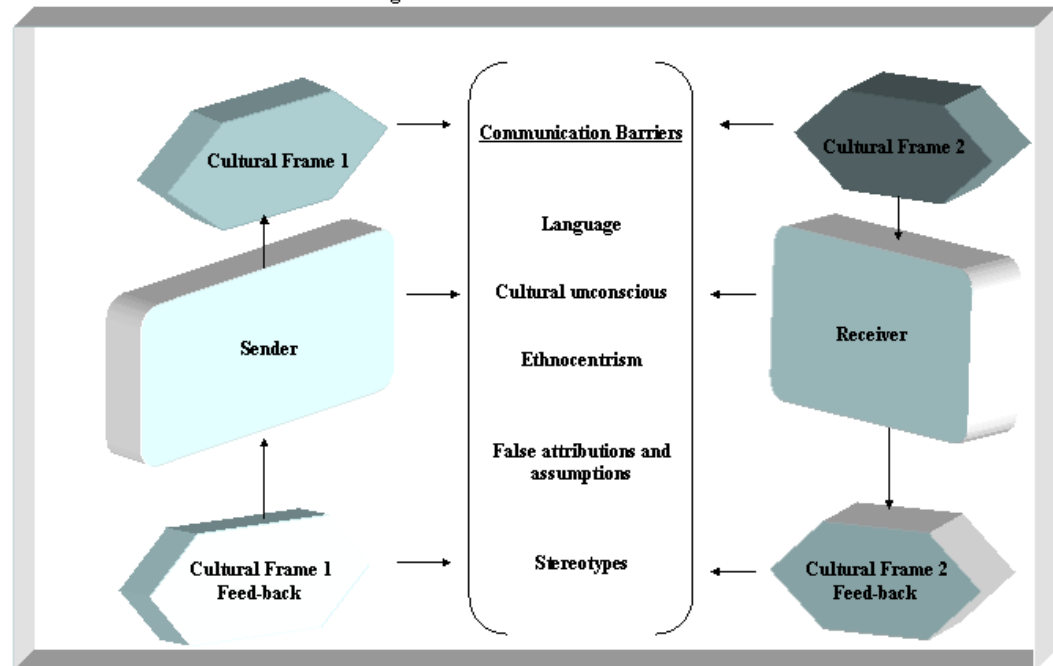
Traditionally *communication* has been explained as an ideal process of exchange of meaning between a sender and a receiver in a given context. Since it is assumed that both the sender and the receiver of the message share the same cultural background, the message encoded by the sender -and transmitted through a written or spoken channel-is decoded and interpreted by the receiver exactly or substantially as it was originally conceived by the sender, and then s/he responds or simply provides feed-back.

Figure 2: Communication



However, this ideal formulation of the process of communication and interaction illustrated in figure 2 above has proved to be inadequate to define the complex nature of *intercultural communication*, since this takes place when the interlocutors are from different cultures. Since they do not have a shared system of behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, values, and meanings, the ultimate interpretation of their corresponding messages may be distorted. A more realistic formulation of the communication and interaction process is shown in figure 3 below. This process comprises the following stages: (a) the sender formulates the message in terms of a cultural frame, (b) the receiver interprets the message in the light of another cultural frame, (c) the receiver creates feedback based on that frame, and (d) the original sender now interprets that feedback from within his or her original frame. This process is full of cultural interferences, and easily leads to a rapid decay of communication. If cultural gaps emerge in the interaction process, *i.e.*, cultural filters are partially or fully dissimilar, the received and interpreted message will almost certainly be different from the intended one, setting in motion a communication or interaction process in which each party is often highly dissatisfied. (Cf. Walker *et. al.*, 2003: 206-215).

Figure 3: Intercultural Communication



As shown in figure 3, the decay of communication produced by mismatched cultural frames is accelerated by a variety of communication barriers that create noise and increase the possibility of further distortion and misunderstanding. These are, among others: (a) *language*, (b) *cultural unconscious*, (c) *ethnocentrism*, (d) *false attributions and assumptions*, and (e) *stereotypes*. (Cf. Walker *et. al.* 2003: 207). Before examining in further detail the concept of cultural frames, let us look in turn at the communication barriers that may hinder intercultural communication in the next subsections.

a) *Language*

Even when all the participants in a cross-cultural encounter supposedly speak the same language, this is undoubtedly one of the most important barriers that may hinder the interaction process between interlocutors. For one thing, language functions as a perceptual lens through which we perceive, select data and create our own version of reality in each culture. (Cf. Whorf 1998: 85-95).

Many companies all over the world readily assume that English is the new *lingua franca* of global communication, just as Latin was used as such in the Middle Ages, and have declared it their official language. But it happens that within the same speech community, there are so many language differences determined by a variety of social variables such as ethnic group, gender, age, class, job, etc., that we may even

wonder how many of us actually speak the same language within the same speech community. However, if the approximately 360 million native speakers of English sometimes experience their shared language as a barrier, for the estimated 1.5 billion of non-native speakers of English, the obstacle is even more complicated. (Cf. Clyne 1994: 208-214). Speakers of English as a foreign language, or offshore English, often superimpose the intonation, rhythm, grammar, vocabulary and discourse patterns of English onto their native language, giving as result the use of an interlanguage, which is a hybrid between English and the corresponding mother tongue, Spanish in our case. (Cf. Kasper and Blum-Kulka, eds., 1993; Trosborg, 1995).

b) *Cultural unconscious*

On dealing with cultural diversity, D. Barnlund (1998: 49) explains the concept of the *cultural unconscious* in these terms: “(...) every society had its own way of viewing the universe, and each developed from its premises a coherent set of rules of behaviour. Each tended to be blindly committed to its own style of life and regarded all others as evil”.

A similar thought is found in this quote from R. D. Lewis (1999 [1996]: 25): “Collective programming in our culture, begun in the cradle and reinforced in school and workplace, convinces us that we are normal, others eccentric”. Perceiving those who have different modes of life to that of oneself as *evil*, *peculiar* or *eccentric* is indeed a form of cultural myopia that clouds the perception and understanding of culture diversity. This communication barrier persists not merely because of inertia and habit but chiefly because it is very difficult to overcome. In other words, to survive in a particular culture people learn the behavioural patterns, beliefs, values and assumptions of their own culture, believing that they are universal values and long before they are capable of truly understanding any of them, since this process of learning is done unconsciously. But once mastered, impartial assessment of these perceptual orientations as particular values of one culture that may differ from those of another is thorny, since the same mechanisms that are being evaluated must be used in making the evaluations. Consequently, the resulting evaluation may never be based on objective parameters.

c) *Ethnocentrism*

Closely related to the communication barrier of the cultural unconscious is *ethnocentrism*. This involves the evaluation of another culture according to the norms, standards, practices, and expectations of one's own cultural frame of reference. Ethnocentrism may be of two kinds: (a) *negative ethnocentrism* and (b) *positive ethnocentrism*. *Negative ethnocentrism* is the belief in the inherent superiority and naturalness of one's own culture and the inferiority of another. Traditionally, Britons have acquired the reputation of holding negative ethnocentric values with respect to other cultures. *Positive ethnocentrism* is the opposite, since it

refers to the elevation of another culture because of a perception that one's own is inferior or in some way lacking. Spaniards may provide a good example of positive ethnocentrism when they compare themselves to individuals from other Western countries. However, we would like to stress the fact that “(...) Either form of ethnocentrism”, as D. Walker, Th. Walker and J. Schmitz (2003: 208) say, “clouds our ability to truly understand and evaluate another culture or its individual members.”

d) *False attributions and inferences*

The cultural unconscious and ethnocentrism, whether negative or positive, may lead to another communication barrier: *false attributions* and *inferences*. When we witness behaviour that differs from our expectations, we try to make sense of it by inferring meaning from it. Usually such attributions and inferences are mistaken because they result from our having only a little knowledge about the frame of reference operating in the other culture. In other words, we infer meaning using the information provided by our own cultural frame rather than analysing the circumstances in which something is said or an action is performed, and choosing the meaning that best fits in the circumstances surrounding the communication and interaction processes.

e) *Stereotypes*

Often our false attributions and inferences may be based on *stereotypes* that we hold about other people whose cultural frames are different to our own. Stereotypes hide a fixed set of ideas about what a particular nationality is like, which is wrongly believed to be true in all cases. Stereotypes are closed categories, resistant vestiges of ethnocentrism, that leave no room for individual differences or exceptions and so make cross-cultural understanding difficult. According to D. Walker, Th. Walker and J. Schmitz (2003: 209), “any new information is channelled into the existing category and thus strengthens the category and confirms our existing viewpoint.” For example, when the author was at the University of East Anglia as a visiting lecturer, she met a professor who commented in an informal after-dinner talk, “You are not very Spanish!” This statement essentially conceals a stereotype. If this professor had been aware of the fact that we hold stereotypes of other people and others hold stereotypes of us, he could have said: “I had one image of Spaniards, but I have to revise it based on my experience with you”.

Now that the complex process involved in intercultural communication as well as the communication barriers that should be overcome have been briefly examined, we will consider the concept of *cultural frame* which has been proved crucial to a better understanding of intercultural communication.

5. Cultural frames.

According to D. Walker, Th. Walker and J. Schmitz (2003: 55): “To navigate through an unfamiliar culture, you need to be able to get your bearings by relating yourself to specific features in the environment the way a sailor uses the sun, the moon, the stars, and the horizon”. In this respect, since the 1950’s many specialists in intercultural communication have suggested cultural models, the main purpose of which has been to identify cultural patterns, frames of reference or perspectives that may be seen as guides to “a limited number of common human problems for which all peoples at all times must find some solution” (Kluckhohn, 1963: 221 quoted in Stewart *et. al.* 1998: 159). The *world dimensions* that have been commonly identified as affecting the patterns of behaviour of people from all over the world are shown in figure 4 below (*cf.* Walker *et. al.* 2003: 56-90):

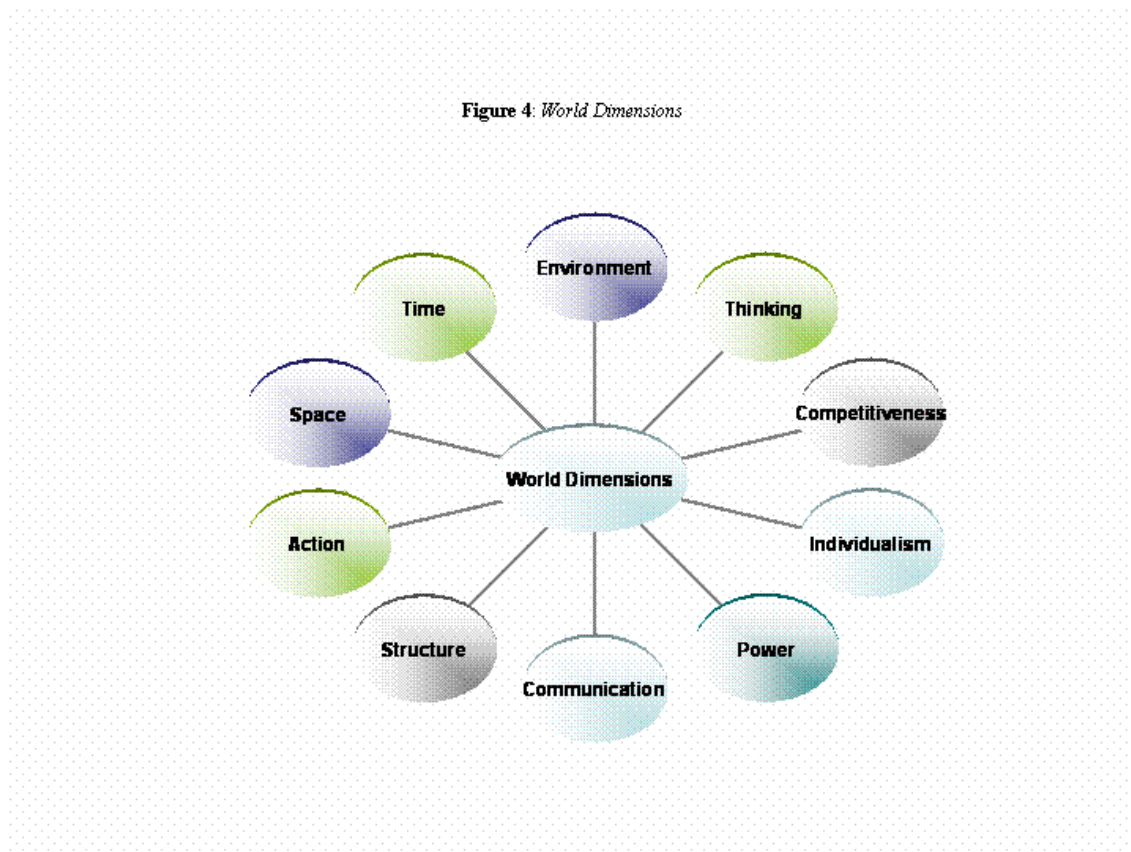


Figure 4 summarises the most remarkable world dimensions affecting people’s patterns of behaviour, attitudes and core beliefs. These are:

- a) The world dimension of *Environment* refers to people’s view of environmental elements and the type of relationship that is established and maintained with them.

- b) The world dimension of *Time* makes reference to people's concept of time and the use they make of it.
- c) The world dimension of *Space* considers the way people delimit their physical and psychological space.
- d) The world dimension of *Action* looks at people's view of actions and interactions.
- e) The world dimension of *Structure* concerns the way people face changes, risks, ambiguity and uncertainty.
- f) The world dimension of *Communication* examines how people express and convey meaning.
- g) The world dimension of *Power* looks at the different power relations that are established and maintained between individuals.
- h) The world dimension of *Individualism* concentrates on the way individuals define their identity.
- i) The world dimension of *Competitiveness* deals with the way individuals are motivated.
- j) The world dimension of *Thinking* focuses on the way individuals conceptualise reality.

In examining world dimensions and cultural orientations, E. T. Hall (1998: 53-67) stresses the power of hidden differences and highlights the concept of unconscious culture. Hidden differences make up what this anthropologist has called *the silent language* which refers to the management of world dimensions such as: (a) *time*, (b) *space*, (c) *context*, and (d) *communication*.

The vast majority of researchers seem to share a similar opinion as regards cultural diversity when they reach the conclusion that people from different cultures may show a wide range of cultural perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values and strategies concerning the management of the above mentioned world dimensions. (Hall, 1959, 1966; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Hofstede, 1980; Stewart and Bennett, 1991; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993; Stewart *et. al.*, 1998; Walker *et. al.*, 2003, etc.).

Since the 1980's Ch. Hampden-Turner and F. Trompenaars (2000) have been doing cross-cultural research based on six dimensions of cultural diversity: (a) *universalism vs particularism*, (b) *individualism vs communitarianism*, (c) *specificity vs diffusion*, (d) *achieved status vs ascribed status*, (e) *inner direction vs outer direction*, and (f) *sequential time vs synchronous time*. After eighteen years of study they have come to the conclusion that foreign cultures, instead of being arbitrarily or randomly different from one another, are *mirror images* of one another's values, reversals of the order and sequence of looking and learning. The metaphor of the mirror image would explain the

idea that cultures have simply made different initial choices when they show preference for a particular direction as regards the dimensions under study, *i.e. universalism vs particularism, individualism vs communitarianism*, etc. For some people the reversal of one's own value systems is frightening, for others fascinating. The fright comes about because many of us mistake such reversal for a negation of what we believe in. Building cross-cultural competence involves making opposite directions meet and reconciling values to create wealth.

In this discussion, a world dimension will be described as a continuum between two opposite strategic cultural orientations along which individual members from different cultures may show their preference for one orientation or the other when they have to face the daily problems associated with such world dimension. For example, the world dimension of *time* may be shown as a continuum between two opposite strategic cultural orientations, *i.e. polychronic and monochronic*, along which different cultures may show divergent or similar preferred orientations: *highly polychronic, moderately polychronic, moderately monochronic, highly monochronic*, etc.

6. Comparison of Spanish and British cultural frames.

Before comparing Spanish and British cultural frames, we would like to clarify two aspects. Firstly, our observations are based on two main sources: (a) the data we collected from a selected sample of eighteen recorded face-to-face interviews with Spanish toy manufacturers, whose companies form part of the worldwide known *Spanish Toy Centre* located in the area of Ibi-Castalla in Alicante (Spain), and from the information provided in the questionnaires that were filled in by staff members of the mentioned companies; and (b) the findings of other specialists carrying out research in the field of Intercultural Communication, utilising especially those of N. Leaptrott (1996), R. D. Lewis (1999 [1996]), and D. Walker, Th. Walker and J. Schmitz (2003).

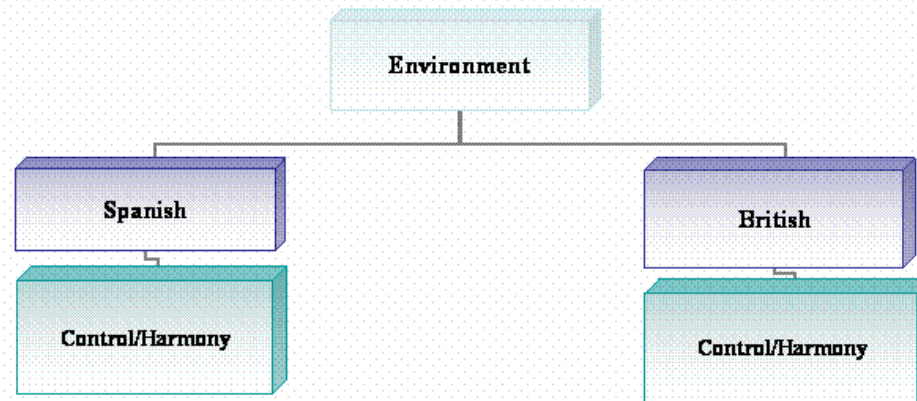
Secondly, the results presented must be understood as *cultural generalizations*, that is, as suppositions or hypotheses about the cultural differences we may come across in a business encounter between Spanish and British people. We believe that cultural generalizations can be made while avoiding stereotypes by maintaining the idea of *preponderance of belief* (Daniel S. Hoopes, 1980 quoted in Milton J. Bennett, 1998: 6). This concept stresses the fact that each different culture has a *preference* for some beliefs over others. The description of this preference, derived from quantitative research, is a cultural generalization. It goes without saying that individuals can be those found in any culture who hold beliefs similar to those of people in a different culture; they are *deviant* in the sense that they do not represent the preponderance of people who hold beliefs closer to the central tendency of the group. (Bennett, 1998: 6; Stewart *et. al.* 1998: 158).

In the next subsections we will present the most relevant findings after having compared Spanish and British strategic cultural orientations toward the world dimensions of: (a) *environment*, (b) *time*, (c) *space*, (d) *action*, (e) *structure*, (f) *communication style*, (g) *power*, (h) *individualism*, (i) *competitiveness*, and (j) *thinking*.

6.1 Environment

The world dimension of *environment* (Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961), *i.e.* people's view of environmental elements and the type of relationship that is established and maintained with them, may be described as a continuum along which three different strategic cultural orientations may be followed by individual members: (a) *control*, (b) *harmony*, and (c) *constraint*. Spanish and British cultures seem to share a mixture of *control* and *harmony* orientations toward the environment. This mixed orientation is manifested in Spaniards' and Britons' use of slow, methodical decision-making processes that are intended to merge the new with the old, as well as in the way they combine a strong desire to shape their environment with an equally strong feeling to maintain harmonious relations with their context and with other people. Both the Spanish and the British appreciate products that fit in their own culture. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 125-126). Figure 5 below summarises the mixed orientation shared by Spaniards and Britons with respect to the world dimension of environment.

Figure 5: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Environment.



6.2 Time

“Every culture has its own clocks”, says E. T. Hall (1998: 66). This statement stresses the fact that every culture has a preferred orientation toward the world dimension of time. According to this author, the basic world time systems can be summarised in two, *i.e. monochronic* and *polychronic* (Hall, 1959; 1966). *Monochronic time* refers to paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time. *Polychronic time* means being involved with many things at once. Monochronic and polychronic time systems are placed at opposite ends of the same time continuum. “Like oil and water”, argues E. T. Hall (1998: 60) of merging, “the two systems do not mix”. The impossibility to merge would explain the different frames of reference with which humans from different cultures organise their daily living and face their problems.

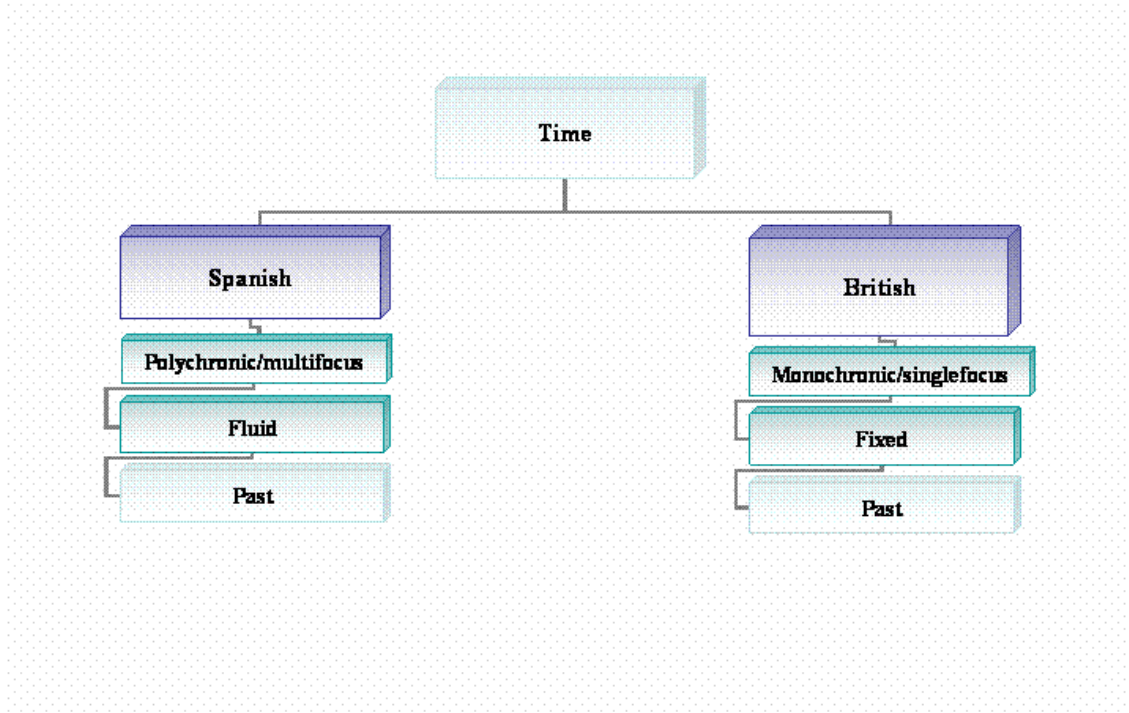
On a continuum of monochronic to polychronic, British culture has been recognized as a *monochronic* culture (Hall, 1998: 60) or *linear-active* culture (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 40), beginning in England with the industrial revolution. This may explain Britons’ traditional preference for a *single focus* strategy, that is, they prefer to do one thing at a time, concentrate on it and do it within a scheduled timescale. Moreover, Britons seem to favour a *fixed* approach to time, with great stress being laid on punctuality, meeting deadlines and schedules, and a *past* orientation when they frequently exude a sense of stability, allude to past models and traditions, and display scepticism in the face of novel ideas, innovative concepts, and proposed changes. (Leaptrott, 1996: 274).

By contrast, Spain has been identified as a *polychronic* culture or *multi-active* culture by many researchers (Lewis, 1999 [1966]: 40). This means that Spaniards in general tend to favour a *multifocus* strategy, that is, they frequently engage in multiple activities at the same time. To illustrate this concept, let us consider, for example, the following two cases. While a foreign visitor is in a Spanish manager's office talking over a project, the manager might also be talking on the phone and signing something for his secretary. In a business meeting, it may also be acceptable for Spanish participants to go in and out of a conference room to answer their mobile phones. Besides, Spaniards seem to favour a *fluid* orientation to time in the sense that they frequently treat schedules and deadlines as approximate, show up late at meetings and turn in work later than expected, as well as expressing a preference for improvisation and a resistance to long-term planning. Moreover, like all Western Europeans, Spaniards have a *past* approach to time when they continue to look to tried-and-true traditions as a way of establishing a solid foundation for the future.

As a result of the cultural divergence between Spanish and British preferred time strategic cultural orientations, with the only exception of a past orientation shared by both, we may begin to understand some of the reasons that may explain Spaniards' cultural perception of Britons as *rigid*, *strict* and *inflexible*. It is obvious that this belief implies that Britons are being observed through Spanish *cultural spectacles*, that is, the core beliefs of Spanish culture influence how Spaniards view British culture, and reveals the existence of a *communication gap*, that is, a lack of understanding of people of other cultures because of differences in their core beliefs, values and attitudes, in this case towards the world dimension of time, etc.

Figure 6 summarises the divergent preferred orientations toward time, with the only exception of a past approach, displayed by Spaniards and Britons in communication and interaction processes:

Figure 6: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Time.



6.3 Personal Space

As in the case of time, *space* (Hall, 1959; 1966; 1998; Walker *et. al.*, 2003) falls into a wide variety of slots. Regarding the slot of *personal space*, we also found clear differences between the strategic cultural orientations exhibited by Britons and Spaniards in face-to-face encounters. Each culture has its own concept of the *space bubble* -the personal space the individual requires to be able to think, talk and gesture in comfort-. (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 132).

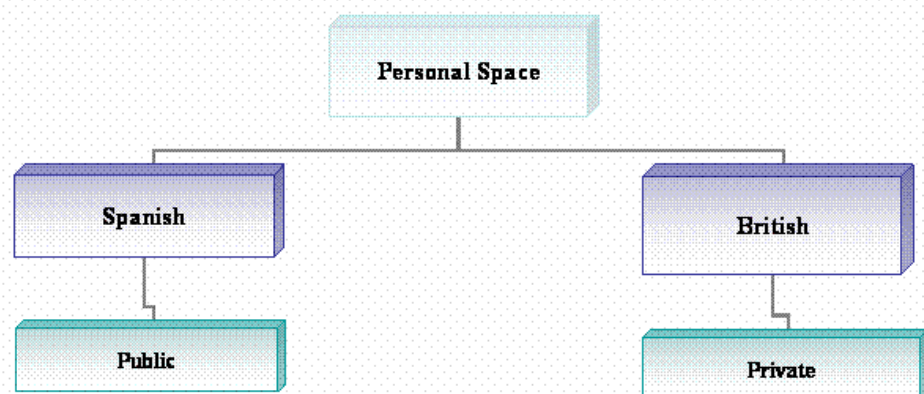
On a continuum of public to private space, Spain, like southern France, Italy and Greece, seems to favour a *public* approach to space when individuals frequently engage in physical contact (touching, embracing, etc.), and stand close to others when interacting with them. (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 243). The space bubble in Spain gets smaller and smaller so that distance perceived as intimate in Northern European countries such as Germany, Scandinavian countries or Great Britain overlaps normal conversational distance in the South. (Hall, 1998: 60). In sum, in Spain, the tendency is for people to get closer to each other than do people in the UK.

By contrast, research has shown that in British culture the “comfort zone”, “the space bubble” or “the distance of comfort” (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 132) is about an arm’s

length. In British culture, individuals favour a *private* approach to space when they avoid close proximity to and physical contact with others, and apologise when they intrude on the space of another, which is clearly shown in linguistic expressions such as “I am sorry to disturb you” or the frequently used “Sorry!” As a result of this, Mediterranean Europeans such as Italians, Greeks, the Portuguese and Spaniards may seem to get too close to Northern Europeans such as Scandinavians, Germans and the British, as they invade their invisible space bubble.

The discrepancy between Spanish and British space values and strategic cultural orientations may serve to explain the reason why Britons look uneasy and move away when approached in conversation by Spaniards, and ultimately the wrong impression Spanish interlocutors may get of their British peers as *distant*, *aloof* and *cold*. Just as personal distance in Spain may be interpreted as intimate distance in Great Britain, personal distance in Great Britain may be interpreted as social distance in Spain. Figure 7 summarises the discrepancy between Spanish and British space values and orientations.

Figure 7: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Personal Space.



6.4 Action

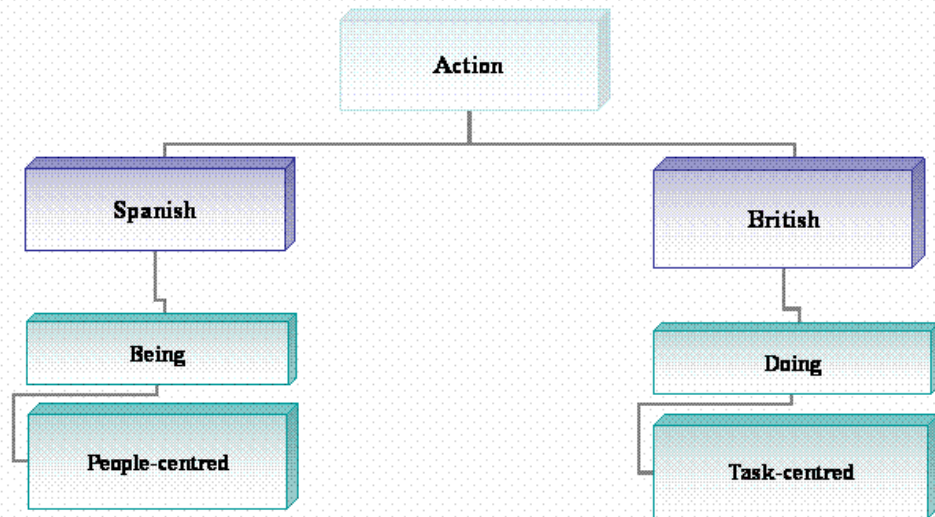
The world dimension of *action* (Hall, 1959; 1966; 1998; Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, 1961; Walker *et. al.*, 2003) may be described on a continuum of *being* to *doing* strategic cultural orientations. The world dimension of *action* is very much influenced by those of time and the effect of context in meaning. It has been found that the fact that Spaniards are moderately high-context communicators may explain the reason why they show preference for a *being* orientation. This is shown in their preference for being *people-centred*, that is, they usually invest considerable time and effort in establishing rapport, and building relationships (Leaptrott, 1996: 323; Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 243), and approach new business situations cautiously. In dealing with a business partner, especially a foreign one, members of a being culture expect to have time to establish rapport with the new partner. Occasionally, this may mean that during the early stages of negotiations, there will be long lunches and dinners at which little business gets discussed. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 12). Tasks and achievements, though considered to be important, are secondary to the establishment of relationships that make these tasks and achievements possible. The being orientation of Western European countries such as Spain, Italy, Greece, Portugal, and so on is reflected in their emphasis on quality of life. Members of a being-oriented culture *work to live* rather than live to work.

By contrast, for the British time is, as we have already said, a linear, scheduled, valuable, even tangible thing. This strategic cultural orientation toward the world dimension of time, together with the fact that they are low-context communicators, may exert influence upon their preference for a *doing* orientation. In a doing-oriented culture, the emphasis is on achieving external measurable accomplishments, reaching goals, and improving standards of living. Members of a doing-oriented culture *live to work* rather than work to live. The *doing* orientation explains Britons' preference for being *task-centred*, *i.e.* they promote focusing exclusively on *getting the job done* rather than on furthering a relationship with the people who are performing a given task, and end relationships with others once the task that led to the relationship is completed. In the business context, relationships are often approached pragmatically.

As a result of the differing Spanish and British strategic cultural orientations toward the world dimension of action, Britons at times will be perceived as *abrupt*, even *cold*, by their Spanish interlocutors. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 129).

Figure 8 shows the divergent orientations toward action exuded by Spanish and British interlocutors in face-to-face interaction encounters.

Figure 8: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Action.

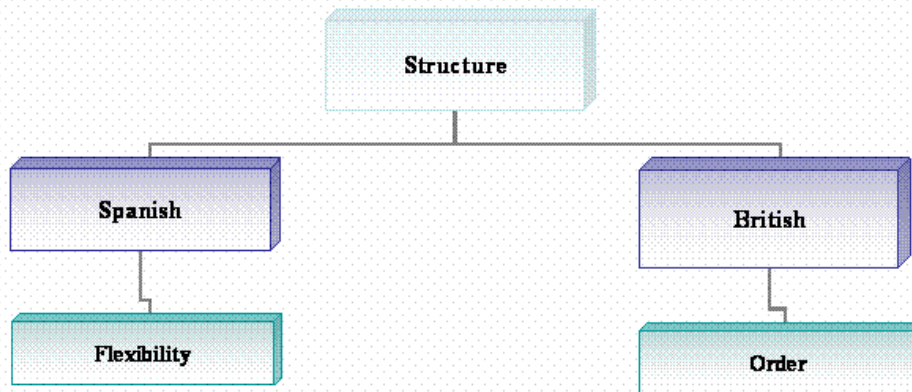


6.5 Structure

The world dimension of *structure* (Hofstede, 1984; Hampden-Turner, 1993; Trompenaars, 1993; Walker *et. al.*, 2003) may be described on a continuum of *flexibility* to *order* orientations. It has been found that Spaniards have a propensity for a *flexible* orientation when dealing with the world dimension of *structure*, because they frequently deemphasise the need for detailed preparation before meetings, presentations, and negotiations, and trust their ability to improvise and make things work without preparation. (Cf. Walker *et. al.*, 2003: 234).

On the contrary, British people tend to an *order* orientation when they habitually require a lot of information, data, and time for contemplation in order to make decisions, and are irritated, insecure, and frustrated in situations that are unpredictable or ambiguous, or that require improvisation and spontaneity. (Leaptrott, 1996: 274; Walker *et. al.*, 2003: 233). Figure 9 displays the different strategic cultural orientations toward structure preferred by Spanish and British speakers in face-to-face- encounters.

Figure 9: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Structure.



6.6 Communication style

“Communication style”, says Sh. J. Ramsey (1998: 112), “has tremendous impact upon the dynamics of face-to-face encounters”. Studying culturally patterned differences of discussion between North Americans and Japanese, Sh. J. Ramsey (1998: 114) puts forward three variables to explore communication style: (a) *orientation to interaction, i.e. individualistic vs interpersonal, objective vs subjective* (b) *code preference, i.e. verbal vs nonverbal*, and (c) *interaction format, i.e. persuasive vs harmonizing, quantitative vs holistic, and pragmatic vs process-oriented*.

In this discussion, five variables are suggested as a core around which to explore divergent communication styles: (a) *the effect of context in meaning*, (b) *interaction style, i.e. directness/indirectness*, (c) *communication function, i.e. expressive/instrumental*, (d) *formality* and (e) *nonverbal communication, i.e. paralanguage, kinesics, oculistics, and haptics*.

a) *The effect of context on meaning*

E. T. Hall (1998: 61) has studied in detail the effect of context on meaning. His research is based on observations of interpersonal transactions across a wide variety of cultural interfaces that took account of how information was handled. The result of his investigations was a scale with *high-context* communication at one end and *low-context*

communication at the other. “A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is already in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message”. (Hall, 1998: 61). By contrast, “a low-context (LC) communication is one in which the mass of information is vested in the explicit code”. (Hall, 1998: 61). Generally speaking, one can say that high-context transactions are more on the feeling, intimate side and hence people-oriented while the low-context ones are less personal and consequently task-oriented.

The effect of context on meaning, drawn as it is from observation of human behaviour, has proved to be a recognizable pattern in a wide range of cultures. In general terms, Northern Europeans can be said to operate lower on the context scale than Southern Europeans.

More specifically, Spaniards have been found to operate moderately high on the context continuum (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 130). As fairly *high-context* communicators, Spaniards will observe their business interlocutors and do business with them not so much for what they say but for the good impression they give; they will rely on nonverbal, symbolic, and situational cues more than on spoken and written cues. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 223).

In contrast, as *low context* communicators, Britons tend to believe that written messages and detailed documentation have more value and significance than information that is conveyed orally or personally. They frequently require that meaningful and significant information be recorded meticulously, ask for and provide explicit confirmation of their understanding of interactions and situations. (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 184).

b) *Interaction style*

Interaction style may also be regarded as a continuum with *directness* at one end and *indirectness* at the other. Spaniards are seen as *direct* communicators. Spaniards may disagree or show frustration openly. For them direct communication is a sign of openness, truthfulness, and honesty.

British people are *indirect* communicators. The British know how to be vague in order to maintain politeness or avoid confrontation. They rarely disagree openly with proposals from the other side in a negotiation. They use implicit ways to communicate disagreement, frustration, and/or anger, such as charm, vagueness in reply, understatement showing, in fact, opposition, (*eg.* “That might be a bit risky”, “I’m afraid that may be far too high for us”), apparent reasonableness, and humour, etc. (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 182-183). Of these, humour (especially irony or sarcasm) is

regarded as one of the most effective strategies in the British manager's interaction style; they use it to stall, confuse opponents, delay the business or even "use it as a weapon in ridiculing an opponent, showing disagreement or even contempt". (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 182).

When Spaniards work with Britons they are often faced with the challenge of the typical ambiguity of British indirect style. Spaniards' social values of honour and dignity may be seriously hurt by Britons' use of irony and sarcasm. Similarly, when Britons work with Spaniards, the Spanish direct style of communication (including direct eye-contact) may be perceived as highly aggressive, adversarial, and ill-mannered. (Cf. Walker *et. al.* 2003: 70). And just as British vagueness and indirectness may be interpreted as trickery, Spanish directness may be interpreted as rudeness.

c) *Communication function*

Communication function may be described as a continuum with expressive orientation at one end and instrumental orientation at the other. Spanish culture demonstrates an expressive orientation toward communication. (Cf. Walker *et. al.* 2003: 131). Spaniards are *expressive* interlocutors, that is, emotional expression and expressiveness play an integral role in convincing and persuading the people with whom you work to adopt a particular point of view. They consider themselves eloquent communicators and place a high priority on aesthetics and style. (Cf. Walker *et. al.* 2003: 132). In expressive cultural environments, there is less concern with factual details and precision than with the establishment and maintenance of emotional connectedness.

At the other end of the continuum are the instrumental communicators. As *instrumental* communicators, British people are believed to value factual, objective, and pragmatic exchanges of information. They see communication as problem –or issue-centred, impersonal, and goal-oriented. They value disciplined, content-based disclosure. Stress is placed on the accuracy of the communication rather than on its appropriateness or style.

The meeting of expressive and instrumental communicators in business situations can have mixed results. In instrumental cultures, displays of emotion are perceived as a lack of professionalism or reason. Being out of control is frowned upon and causes embarrassment. The ideal in such cultures is to keep emotions hidden as much as possible, even under stress. The English refer to this as "keeping a stiff upper lip". (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 72).

Britons, as individuals with an instrumental orientation, may interpret expressive individuals as difficult, embarrassing, or irrational. Spaniards, as individuals with an

expressive orientation, may perceive those who hide their emotions as *unapproachable*, *cold*, or even *deceitful*. (Cf. Walker *et. al.* 2003: 71).

d) *Formality*

Formality may be depicted as a continuum with formality at one end and informality at the other. Formal communication and adherence to protocol facilitate communication and business in Western Europe. In both Spain and Great Britain business is conducted on the basis of formality, courtesy, respect, and good manners. In Great Britain, formality and indirect politeness go hand in hand. In English such conditional phrases as “could I [...]” or “would you [...]” are the norm in asking questions, and the frequent use of “thank you” and “please” is expected. However, in Spain formality is more associated with non-verbal clues than with speech which tends to favour directness.

e) *Nonverbal communication*

Nonverbal communication may also be regarded as a continuum with expressive body language at one end and body language control at the other. As expressive communicators, Spaniards regard their language as instruments of eloquence. To convey their ideas fully they will ransack an extensive vocabulary, use generously their hands, arms and facial expressions and make maximum use of pitch and tone. (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 95; Walker *et. al.* 2003: 225). Spaniards’ body language is likely to be demonstrative, and they may even seek and expect physical contact with other partners, *i.e.* touching and hugging may be considered an acceptable form of behaviour among people in business encounters. In Spain, the use of non-verbal communication in back-channelling is particularly relevant because it gives the speaker an indication that the hearer is listening with attention and may or may not be interested in the proposal. (Cf. Clyne, 1994: 110-113).

For Britons, however, control of the body means that you are in control both mentally and emotionally. (Leaptrott, 1996: 92). This is the reason why in English, people usually keep their hands still and gesticulate very little in face-to-face encounters. Touching and hugging are not expected in business encounters.

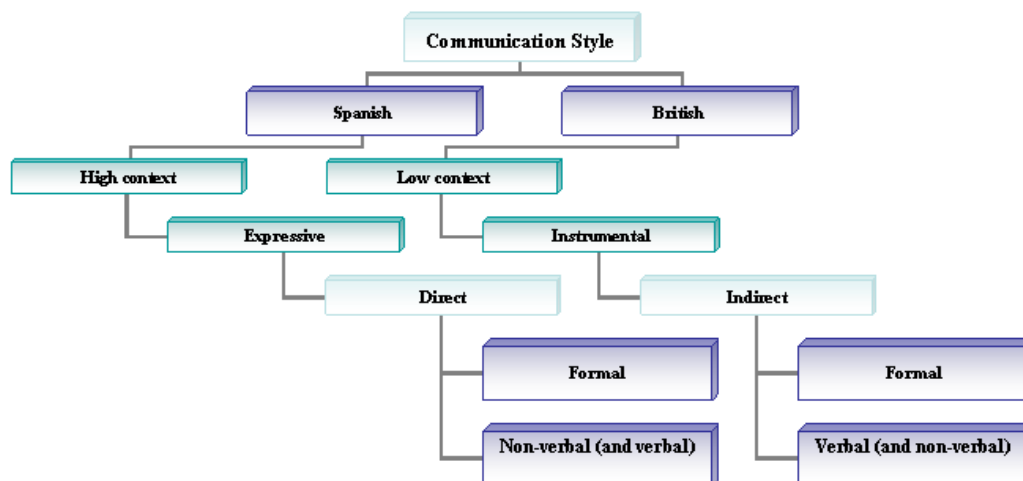
Intonation patterns and the tone of the voice may vary widely in British and Spanish cultures. What in British culture sounds like a hysterical argument, in Spanish culture would be considered to be the norm for a reasonable discussion. In Great Britain, however, individuals will use a quiet tone to score points, always attempting to remain low key. (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 95).

As far as oculistics is concerned, the length of time it is acceptable to look directly at someone can also differ from the UK to Spain. In the former, looking someone in the eye can be seen as a sign of disrespect. In Spain, however, looking someone in the eye is taken as a sign of interest and honesty.

As a result of the widely differing non-verbal communication styles exhibited by Spaniards and Britons, one can say that the meeting of Spaniards and Britons may have mixed results. The Spanish may be perceived as overemotional histrionic people who lack professionalism in business encounters. In contrast, Britons may be perceived as unemotional, expressionless, and aloof people when viewed by Spaniards.

Figure 10 shows the different communication styles exuded by Spanish and British speakers in face-to-face encounters.

Figure 10: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Communication Style.

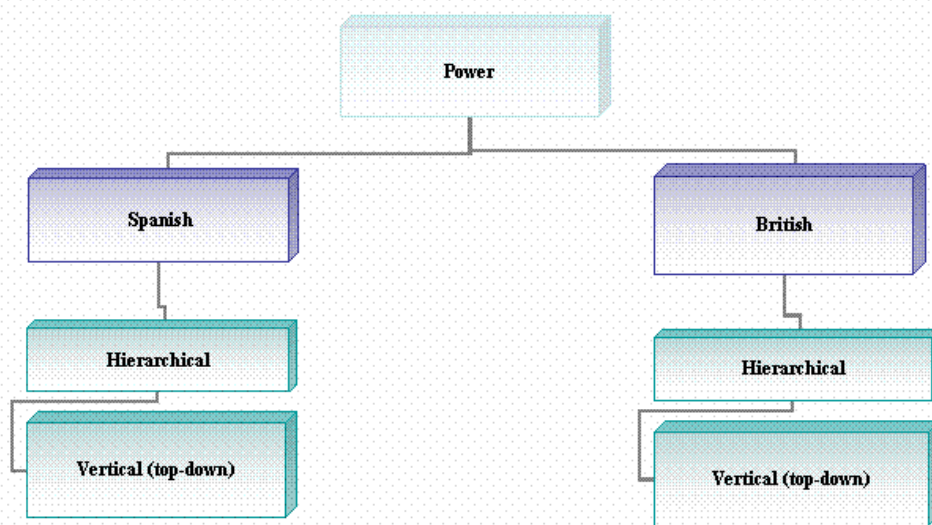


6.7 Power

Power may be portrayed along a continuum with *hierarchy* at one end and *equality* at the other. The data show that Spanish and British speakers show similar beliefs and values concerning the world dimension of *power* (Hofstede, 1984; Hampden-Turner,

1993; Trompenaars, 1993; Walker *et. al.*, 2003). Spanish and British companies seem to share a *hierarchical structure*: the boss is the leader, the organisational structure is generally vertical, with all important decisions being made at the top, then handed down to the lower ranks in the form of detailed directives (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 135; Leaptrott, 1996: 89). Figure 11 summarises the preferred hierarchical orientation toward power shared by Spaniards and Britons.

Figure 11: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Power.



6.8 Individualism

The world dimension of *individualism* (Hofstede, 1984; Hampden-Turner, 1993; Trompenaars, 1993; Walker *et. al.*, 2003) is closely related to the concept of the self, namely the way individuals from a particular culture define their own identity. Individualism may be described as a continuum along which three main strategic cultural orientations can be followed by individuals: (a) *individualism*, (b) *tribalism*, and (c) *collectivism*. On a continuum of *individualism* to *collectivism*, Spain and Great Britain, like most Western European cultures, value *individualism*. Nevertheless, their values and orientations toward this world dimension differ slightly.

On the one hand, Spain's history is dominated by Roman, Islamic, and Catholic rule at various times. These three cultural powers the influence of which was resident for centuries, were all *tribal* in nature, with strong authoritarian power structures.

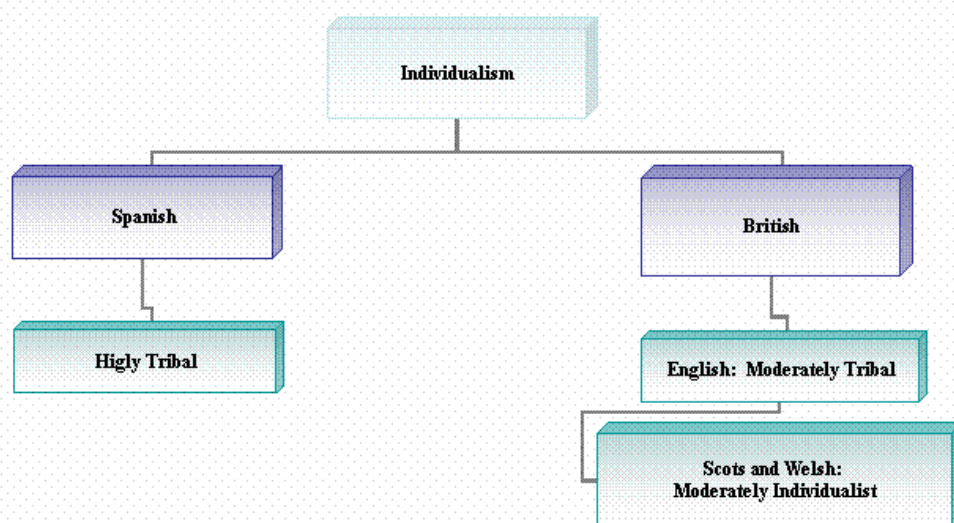
Consequently, Spain is tribal and so its primary motivation is the power and welfare of the family group. (Leaptrott, 1996: 107-109, 322).

On the other hand, Great Britain comprises England, Scotland and Wales. Although the foundations of English culture are extremely individual-oriented, there is a strong overlap of tribal values from both the Roman and Holy Roman empires that leaves England a predominantly tribal society –the English derive their identity from their family and its place in society –and Scotland and Wales, as a result of having escaped from the invasion of the Roman empire, seem to favour high individualistic values, in which to speak one's mind is highly valued and considered to be a sign of honesty. (Leaptrott, 1996: 88, 274).

In contrast, in Spain high individualism has negative connotations associated with it, as it is often thought of as refractoriness to organisation and authority and even scorn to government. (Lewis, 1999 [1996]: 242).

In sum, on a continuum from collectivism to individualism, Spaniards are thought to hold high tribal values, whereas Britons, especially Scots and the Welsh, hold values that vary from a moderately tribal orientation to a moderately individualistic one. Figure 12 summarises the results after having compared Spanish and British strategic cultural orientations toward the world dimension of individualism.

Figure 12: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Individualism.



6.9 Competitiveness

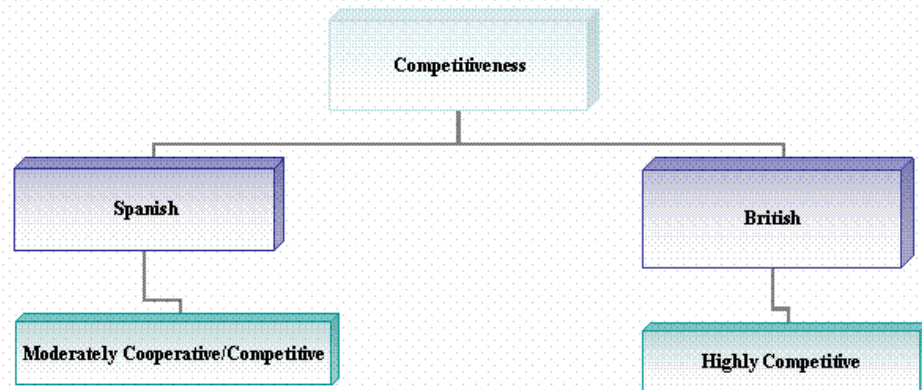
The world dimension of *competitiveness* (Hofstede, 1984; Hampden-Turner, 1993; Trompenaars, 1993; Walker *et. al.*, 2003) is closely related to that of *action*. Spain and Britain, like most Western European countries, have a competitive orientation based on the desire to improve products. However, on a continuum of *competitiveness* to *cooperativeness*, the British seem to operate higher on the scale than their Spanish interlocutors.

Like individuals who are oriented toward competitiveness, Britons *live to work* and therefore, they emphasise achievement, results, and goals. High value is placed on ambition, assertiveness, decisiveness, initiative, performance excellence, and speed.

By contrast, since Spaniards *work to live*, they tend to favour a mixture of competitiveness and cooperativeness when they focus on quality of life, spend a lot of time building and maintaining relationships, and express concern with job satisfaction.

The effects of the differences between competitiveness and cooperativeness are often felt in multicultural team situations. Britons, as highly competitive individuals, may perceive Spaniards as lazy or uncommitted, while these, as cooperative individuals, may perceive Britons as invasive, disrespectful, emotionless or having no sense of priorities. (Walker *et. al.*, 2003: 81). Figure 13 portrays the differing Spanish and British strategic cultural orientations toward the world dimension of competitiveness.

Figure 13: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Competitiveness.



6.10 Thinking

The world dimension of *thinking* may be described on two continua: (a) *inductive vs deductive orientations* and (b) *linear vs systemic orientations*.

a) *Inductive vs deductive orientations*

In Western Europe, both the deductive and the inductive orientations toward thinking are exhibited. Great Britain illustrates the inductive orientation. Spain, however, shows a mix of these two orientations. The inductive orientation calls for acquiring as much data as possible. Britons are detail-oriented and prefer large amounts of information and precise data for a given project. The inductive thinker is most concerned with the *how* and the *what* and will consider the *why* to be unnecessary. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 140). Individuals with an inductive orientation are frequently interested in discussing case studies rather than theories, emphasise application, and ask for examples to illustrate a given idea.

The deductive orientation lays stress on personal experience, and experimentation coupled with established theory are used to build a foundation from which general concepts and conclusions can emerge. These concepts, in turn, become the basis for understanding specific situations. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 140). Individuals with this orientation frequently: (a) present theories, concepts, and models before describing

particular cases; (c) deemphasise application and implementation; (d) and become impatient and frustrated with case studies and anecdotes.

As a result of these different approaches, negotiations between deductive thinkers and counterparts with an inductive orientation can be highly frustrating for both parties. Very often, Britons, as inductive thinkers, may want to begin a negotiation with specific items –for example, price or distribution. Spaniards, with a mixture of inductive and deductive orientations, on the other hand, may want to present their products thoroughly before discussing the details of the negotiation. The pace of the deductive style, which can be slower than that of the inductive one, may also be frustrating to the inductive thinker. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 140).

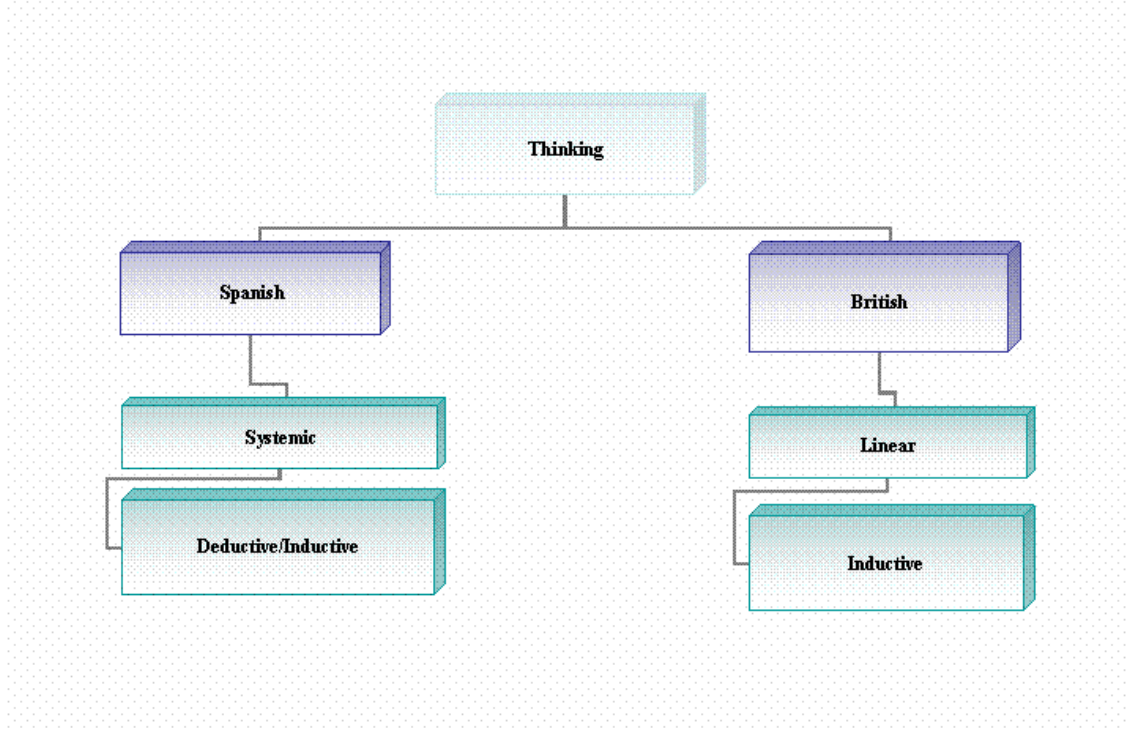
b) *Linear vs systemic*

The British are linear-thinking oriented. When faced with a problem, linear cultures break it down into small pieces, which can then be linked in chains of cause and effect, and want to analyse and understand every aspect of it before moving on to the next. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 141) Individuals with this orientation frequently find the arguments of systemic thinkers lacking in focus and clarity.

Spain, like most Mediterranean countries, has a systemic orientation toward thinking. Systemic thinkers prefer to understand a project or issue as a whole before moving on to individual details. Their thinking is holistic or synthetic, focusing on the relationship and interconnectedness of the various parts. Individuals with this orientation frequently find linear approaches excessively simplistic.

In the opinion of Spanish negotiators, as systemic thinkers, their British counterpart's proposal may lack clarity, giving too much detail about individual components to the exclusion of the larger goal. On the other hand, the British businessperson, being more linear, would be disappointed at a perceived lack of attention to detail on the part of his associate who will be more interested in presenting a global view before discussing the details of the negotiation. (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 141). Figure 14 illustrates the differing Spanish and British strategic cultural orientations toward the world dimension of thinking.

Figure 14: Comparison of Spanish and British orientations toward Thinking.



7. Strategies for developing cross-cultural competence.

After comparing the different orientations pursued by Spaniards and Britons toward a variety of world dimensions, we have been able to understand the communication barriers as well as the cultural gaps that may emerge when individuals from both cultures are involved in interaction. Mismatched frames of reference may lead to mismatched expectations and these to the decay of communication. Answering the question why it is that contact with persons from other cultures is so often frustrating and burdened with misunderstanding. L. M. Barna (1998: 173-189) suggests six *stumbling blocks* in cross-cultural communication:

- a) Assumption of similarities –many people naively assume there are sufficient similarities among peoples of the world to make communication easy-.
- b) Language differences and styles: vocabulary, syntax, idiomatic expressions, slang, dialects, politeness strategies, language style –direct vs. indirect, expressive vs. instrumental, expansive vs. succinct, argumentative vs. conciliatory.
- c) Nonverbal misinterpretations.
- d) Preconceptions and stereotypes.
- e) Tendency to evaluate.
- f) Culture shock and high anxiety.

Each of these stumbling blocks can lead to wrong interpretations of intent and evaluations of insincerity, aggressiveness, deceitfulness, or arrogance, etc. Being aware of the six stumbling blocks is certainly the first step in avoiding them, but it is not easy. For most people it takes insight, training, and sometimes an alteration of long-standing habits or thinking patterns before progress can be made. In dealing with the development of cross-cultural competence, a variety of well-known philosophers, anthropologists, and linguists have suggested different strategies. In the next paragraphs we will summarise some of the most relevant contributions to this field of research.

J. M. Bennett (1998: 215-223) suggests a communication strategy by means of which *culture shock* should be considered as a subcategory of *transition experiences*. Whereas in the former, change is perceived as disorientation and may produce barriers and defensive communication, in the latter, change is perceived as a challenge toward our worldview that can stimulate creativity, flexible communication and personal growth. With knowledge gained from previous transition experiences, plus the personal characteristics of self-awareness and cultural empathy, we can transform our defensiveness into stimulating cross-cultural learning.

For M. J. Bennett (1998: 24-32) the crux of intercultural communication is in how people *adapt* to other cultures. He defines *adaptation* as the strategic process whereby one's worldview is expanded to include behaviour and values appropriate to the host culture. The assumed end result of adaptation is becoming a bicultural or multicultural person. His research on the communication strategy based on adaptation has given rise to *The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)*. M. J. Bennett's model is based on meaning-making models of cognitive psychology, and links changes in cognitive structure to an evolution in attitudes and behaviour toward cultural difference in general. The DMIS shows how cultural adaptation, like many other human abilities, is divided into *ethnocentric* and *ethnorelative* stages. (M. J. Bennett 1998: 26).

On the one hand, the *ethnocentric* stage comprises the following substages:

a) *Denial*. People at the denial stage are unable to construe cultural differences in complex ways.

b) *Defense*. People at the defense stage have more ability to construe cultural difference, but they attach negative evaluations to it.

c) *Minimization*. People at the minimization stage recognise and accept superficial cultural differences such as eating customs and other social norms, but they assume that deep down all people are essentially the same.

d) *Acceptance*. People at the acceptance stage enjoy recognizing and exploring cultural differences. They are aware that they themselves are cultural beings.

e) *Adaptation*. People at the adaptation stage use knowledge about their own and others' cultures to intentionally shift into a different cultural frame of reference.

On the other hand, the *ethnorelative* stage includes a final substage:

a) *Integration* People at the integration stage of development are attempting to reconcile the sometimes conflicting cultural frames that they have internalized. As people move into integration, they achieve an identity which allows them to see themselves as "interculturalists" or "multiculturalists" in addition to their national and ethnic backgrounds.

Closely related to the communication strategy of adaptation suggested by M. J. Bennett is his concept of communication based on *empathy* (M. J. Bennett, 1998: 191-214). In his view, empathy is essential to understand *multiple-reality* and *cultural difference* in intercultural communication. In his opinion, the use of empathy might serve to create a more sensitive and respectful climate for interracial and intercultural communication for various reasons: (a) empathy, contrary to the concept of sympathy which is based on ethnocentric values of culture similarity and a single-reality that promote the religious belief that all of us are equally human, assumes culture divergence and it is related to theories of multiple-reality. (b) In empathy, we are concerned with participating in another's experience and taking his/her perspective rather than merely changing places with him or her, as occurs with sympathy. M. J. Bennett has designed a model for the development of empathy that comprises the following stages: (a) assuming difference, (b) knowing self, (c) suspending self, (c) allowing guided imagination, (d) allowing empathic experience, (e) re-establishing self. The result being the platinum rule, which characterises the concept of communication based on empathy: *Do unto others as they themselves would have done unto them* instead of the underlying assumption of the Golden rule, which is a characteristic feature of communication based on sympathy: *Other people want to be treated as I do*.

Building cross-cultural competence also involves a strategic use of language. In a business world in which English is the *lingua franca*, both native and non-native speakers share responsibility for minimizing the barriers that language can pose. The following list summarises some of the practices associated with this responsibility: (a) be aware of your accent and pronunciation, (b) avoid complex grammatical structures such as long sentences and double negatives, (c) avoid jargon, slang, idiomatic expressions, and colloquialisms; (d) be aware of topic appropriateness; (e) avoid voicing strong opinions on a topic that may be internal to a particular culture; (f) seek clarification when you do not understand something, and use open-ended questions; (g) invite feed-back on the clarity of your speech; (h) use spoken and written media to communicate, reinforce, and clarify your message (Walker *et. al.* 2003: 210-212).

To master cross-cultural competence, individuals need to go through a complex process that comprises several interrelated aspects that need to be polished through continuous learning, training and personal growth. These are: (a) an open attitude and eagerness to learn other people's cultural values, (b) self-awareness as cultural individuals, (c) awareness of other people's frames of reference and cultural orientations, (d) cross-cultural knowledge, and (e) cross-cultural skills and strategies, which may include, for instance, being more polite and formal in a foreign culture than you would be in your own, staying formal until you are invited to use more familiar terms, taking time to learn names and titles, and their correct pronunciations, learning the culture's customs regarding the giving of gifts, observing status and power differences, or understanding customs in relation to alcohol and appropriate food.

8. Conclusions.

The purpose of this discussion has been to explore what makes a sample of Spanish toy manufacturers think British people are *most peculiar* in business. To achieve our aim at the beginning of this study we posed three research questions of direct concern for intercultural communication between Spaniards and Britons: (a) To what extent and in what areas do Spanish and British cultural patterns collide? b) What are the particular friction points or areas needing special attention that commonly emerge for Spaniards in everyday interaction with Britons? And c) What type of strategies should be developed to overcome culture divergence?

Findings from this study confirm that when Spanish and British speakers interact they exhibit differing cultural frames, *i.e.*, different classification and categories with which they organise their experience. It has been shown that their respective cultural frames may collide because they do not share the same system of orientations toward a variety of world dimensions such as: (a) environment, (b) time, (c) space, (d) action, (e) structure, (f) communication style, (g) power, (h) individualism, (i) competitiveness, and (j) thinking.

More specifically, the data reveal that Spaniards and Britons exude rather incompatible orientations toward the world dimensions of *time*, *space*, *action*, *structure*, *communication style* together with *nonverbal behaviour*, and *thinking*. As a result of their mismatched cultural frames, culture gaps, *i.e.* lack of understanding of other people's culture, emerge and Spaniards, as individuals of a multi-active culture perceive Britons, who belong to a linear-active culture, as *peculiar*, *cold* and *distant*. On the one hand, the British are seen as *peculiar* because their patterns of behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and values are different to those exhibited by the Spanish. On the other

hand, Britons are perceived as *cold* and *distant* mainly because of their differing space and communication style orientations.

When Spanish toy manufacturers use adjectives such as *peculiar*, *aloof*, *cold* and *distant* to give their opinion of their British customers, what they do not realise is that they are observing Britons through Spanish cultural spectacles, that is, their core beliefs influence how they view British people and so, they are externalising inner feelings of dissatisfaction and discomfort that are created by cultural gaps and that are even amplified by communication barriers such as: (a) language, (b) the cultural unconscious, (c) ethnocentrism, (d) false attributions and inferences, and (e) stereotypes. This feeling of dissatisfaction and discomfort produced by cultural gaps makes Spaniards experiment *social distance* on the behavioural, cognitive and emotional level, and it is in fact one of the consequences of the invisible face of culture.

While some of the Spaniards sampled seem to take a defensive attitude toward British culture, others tend to minimise cultural differences, being aware only of superficial differences related to social etiquette and customs. However, most of them seem to be a long way from reaching the stages of acceptance, adaptation, and integration that may lead to cross-cultural competence.

If it is true that it is hard for Spaniards to understand Britons, it is equally true that only with large doses of self-awareness as cultural beings, awareness of cultural diversity, respect and curiosity for other people's own modes of culture, and cultural empathy will they be able to overcome the frustrations that occur as they flounder from one misunderstanding to another in their daily interaction. We tend to make the mistake of thinking that when people speak the same language they can communicate the same thoughts. The educational and training implications of this discussion are obvious. The issue of intercultural communication and cross-cultural discourse variation is one which educational institutions and professional associations need to consider seriously if their aim is to help professionals achieve cross-cultural competence in today's global market.

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